

Pandemic Flu Information Page

What is Pandemic Influenza?

Influenza, or flu, is a viral infection of the lungs. There are two main types of flu virus, A and B. Each type includes many different strains and new strains emerge periodically. Flu outbreaks occur most often in late fall and winter.

Pandemic flu is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza A virus appears in humans, causes serious illness and then spreads easily from person to person worldwide.

What is the difference between Pandemic Flu and the Seasonal Flu?

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
Outbreaks follow predictable seasonal patterns; occurs annually, usually in winter, in temperate climates	Occurs rarely (three times in 20th century - last in 1968)
Usually some immunity built up from previous exposure	No previous exposure; little or no pre-existing immunity
Healthy adults usually not at risk for serious complications; the very young, the elderly and those with certain underlying health conditions at increased risk for serious complications	Healthy people may be at increased risk for serious complications
Health systems can usually meet public and patient needs	Health systems may be overwhelmed
Vaccine developed based on known flu strains and available for annual flu season	Vaccine probably would not be available in the early stages of a pandemic
Adequate supplies of antiviral are usually available	Effective antiviral may be in limited supply
Average U.S. deaths approximately 36,000/yr	Number of deaths could be quite high (e.g., U.S. 1918 death toll approximately 500,000)
Symptoms: fever, cough, runny nose, muscle pain. Deaths often caused by complications, such as pneumonia.	Symptoms may be more severe and complications more frequent
Generally causes modest impact on society (e.g., some school closing, encouragement of people who are sick to stay home)	May cause major impact on society (e.g. widespread restrictions on travel, closings of schools and businesses, cancellation of large public gatherings)
Manageable impact on domestic and world economy	Potential for severe impact on domestic and world economy

What is the treatment for the Flu?

For the quickest recovery of the seasonal flu, get plenty of rest, drink fluids like juice, water, or tea. Do not give any medications without first consulting your family physician. If a fever lasts more than 3 days, see a doctor, where they may prescribe available antiviral medication.

Because there has been no previous exposure or historical data collection on the current pandemic flu, vaccines may be unavailable in the short term. To offset and lessen the chances of contracting this virus, besides following above information, it is essential that everyone maintain healthy and sanitary precautions, like hand-washing and the use hand sanitizers, as well as following 'proper' sneeze and cough etiquette- cover your nose and mouth when sneezing followed by washing your hands.

Does a flu shot protect against pandemic flu?

Current flu vaccines will not protect against a new pandemic strain of flu virus. Because it takes several months to develop and distribute vaccine for a new strain, a vaccine probably would not be available in the early stages of a pandemic. If a pandemic occurs, it is expected that the U.S. government will work with many partner groups to make recommendations to guide the early use of vaccine.

Are there any other treatments for pandemic flu?

Antiviral medications can be used to treat and/or prevent influenza viruses. However, flu strains can become resistant to antiviral medications. For example, only one antiviral medication works against the H5N1 Avian Flu virus identified in human patients in Asia in 2004 and 2005. The supply of this antiviral medication is very limited worldwide, and no pharmaceutical company in the United States manufactures it.

When is the next flu pandemic expected?

Three pandemics occurred in the 20th century, all of which spread around the world within one year of being detected. Of these, the pandemic of 1918-1919 was the most severe, with 50 million or more deaths worldwide.

No one can predict when a pandemic might occur, but many scientists believe it is only a matter of time before the next one arises. Experts from around the world are watching the H5N1 Avian (bird) Flu situation in the Middle East, Europe and Asia very closely and are preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread more easily and widely from person to person.

What risks do Virginians face if there is a pandemic of flu?

If a new and severe strain of flu were to begin spreading across the globe, Virginia would not be spared from its impact. The severity of the next pandemic cannot be predicted, but modeling studies suggest that its effect in the United States could be severe. In the absence of any control measures (vaccination or drugs), it has been estimated that in the United States a "medium-level" pandemic could cause:

- 89,000 to 207,000 deaths
- 314,000 and 734,000 hospitalizations
- 18 to 42 million outpatient visits
- 20 to 47 million people becoming sick
- An economic impact ranging between \$71.3 and \$166.5 billion

In Virginia, pandemic flu impact estimates include:

- 2,700 to 6,300 deaths
- 12,000 to 28,500 hospitalizations
- 575,000 to 1.35 million outpatient visits
- 1.08 million to 2.52 million people becoming sick

Flu pandemics are different from many of the threats for which public health and the health-care system are currently planning:

The pandemic will last much longer than most other emergency events and may include waves of flu activity separated by months (in 20th century pandemics, a second wave of flu activity occurred three to 12 months after the first wave).

The numbers of health-care workers and first responders available to work can be expected to be reduced as they will be at high risk of illness through exposure in the community and in health care settings, and some may have to miss work to care for ill family members.

Resources in many locations could be limited because of how widespread a flu pandemic would be.

What should you be doing?

Protect yourself against the spread of the flu and other germs and viruses:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- Wash hands thoroughly and often
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth
- Stay home when you are sick
- Visit www.cdc.gov/germstopper/ for more information.
- Familiarize yourself with the [Individuals and Families Checklist](#)

Items to have on hand for an extended stay at home:

Examples of food and non-perishables	Examples of medical, health, and emergency supplies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, vegetables, and soups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prescribed medical supplies such as glucose and blood-pressure monitoring equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protein or fruit bars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soap and water, or alcohol-based hand wash
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dry cereal or granola	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medicines for fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peanut butter or nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thermometer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dried fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anti-diarrheal medication

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crackers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned juices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluids with electrolytes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottled water (1 gallon a day per person) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleansing agent/soap
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned or jarred baby food and formula 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flashlight
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pet food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Batteries
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portable radio
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual can opener
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garbage bags
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers

Information Sources

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CD) www.cdc.gov/flu
2. US Government website www.pandemicflu.gov
3. Virginia Department of Health www.vdh.state.va.us/pandemicflue/index.asp